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Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/124 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/4. It examines some of the key improvements to humanitarian activities, focuses on technical proposals to strengthen response capacities at all levels and highlights other issues of concern, such as gender-based violence and chronically underfunded crises.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report responds to the requests contained in General Assembly resolution 60/124 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/4 on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

2. The report has also been prepared in consideration of the theme of the humanitarian affairs segment of the 2006 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, entitled, "Strengthening of the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance: implementing improved humanitarian response at all levels, including strengthening capacity, with particular attention to recent humanitarian emergencies, including severe natural disasters" and the panel discussions on "gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies" and "addressing chronically underfunded crises".

II. The year in review

3. The past year has been characterized by both more natural disasters of exceptional magnitude, and worrying trends in complex emergencies. Whether associated with socio-political factors or natural hazards, the disproportionate impact such crises have on vulnerable countries and communities will continue to demand attention. If current levels of vulnerability are left unchecked, increasing displacement, development setbacks and enduring cycles of poverty will result.

4. The humanitarian system has also quickly evolved from a system of relatively few actors to one of many actors, with varying skills and priorities. Its coordination mechanisms, however, have yet to employ such resources to optimum effect. For example, there are currently some 13,000 humanitarian workers operating in the Sudan, yet the system still experiences setbacks in quickly mobilizing the people with the right skills and continues to import staff, technology and supplies when local sources might be more efficient and appropriate. In responding to large-scale disasters, international responders have sometimes been slow to coordinate with government and local actors, though in many cases they have proven to be the most important players.

5. Though the principles that guide humanitarian action are clearly articulated in General Assembly resolution 46/182 and are routinely reinforced in resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, their respect and application on the ground continue to be uneven in many areas.

6. Strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, therefore, requires reorienting humanitarian systems towards stabilizing populations and ending the destructive cycles of vulnerability. This means continuing to make improvements to the United Nations own humanitarian response system; strengthening the capacity of national and local governments and communities to prepare for and respond to crises; broadening engagement and coordination with relevant non-United Nations humanitarian actors; and advocating for the respect for the internationally agreed principles that underpin humanitarian work.

A. The year in disasters

7. The past year was marked by an 18 per cent rise in the number of reported large-scale disasters, which killed 92,000 persons and affected 157 million people, with estimated global costs of 159 billion United States dollars ($) in material damage. Though such figures tend to vary from year to year, overall trends suggest that disasters are becoming more frequent, severe and destructive: While overall mortality rates from these disasters have declined during the last two decades, the number of people affected by disasters was three times higher in the 1990s than in the 1970s, with a fivefold increase in economic losses.

8. The growing frequency and severity of hydro-meteorological hazards (floods, droughts, windstorms), accounting for more than 96 per cent or affected populations in 2005, is a worrying trend. The level of destruction such hazards can cause is evidenced by the recent Atlantic hurricane season, one of the costliest, deadliest and strongest on record. Twenty-seven tropical storms, including 13 hurricanes, ravaged communities in 12 countries, killed more than a thousand people, displaced hundreds of thousands and caused widespread destruction on islands already damaged by previous years' storms.

9. Geological hazards, such as earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis, represented the deadliest natural hazards in 2005. The 7.6-magnitude earthquake that struck South Asia in October 2005 devastated large parts of northern Pakistan, killing close to 75,000 people, injuring an almost equal number, and leaving more than 3 million homeless (see A/61/78-E/2006/61 and A/61/79-E/2006/67).

10. The effects of shorter drought cycles on populations in the Horn of Africa must be addressed as a matter of urgent concern. What are now three- to five-year cycles have led to chronic and heightened vulnerability where even minor shocks, such as the recent localized flooding in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, have led to destitution and hunger, the disruption of pastoral livelihoods and an elevated risk of conflict over scarce resources. The uneven implementation of food security programmes, poor funding for relief activities, limited training for response at the local level and limited infrastructure have only aggravated the problem. More than 15 million people are estimated to be affected by the drought in the Horn of Africa; of those, more than 8 million have been identified as requiring emergency assistance.

11. Addressing what has become a vicious cycle of recurrent human and material loss, environmental and social degradation and increased vulnerability requires that the international community work towards a disaster management approach that tackles the interconnectedness of threats and vulnerabilities on a global scale. This includes engaging in strategic disaster planning and preparedness at regional, national and local levels, sustaining high levels of assistance for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction and prioritizing risk reduction as a matter of urgency. A number of studies have identified countries at risk for a variety of natural hazards. Targeting such disaster "hot-spots" would be an important place to begin.

12. Ending cycles of vulnerability also means taking a regional and longer-term approach to humanitarian crises that require a transnational and multifaceted response. In April 2006, the Secretary-General, in consultation with the affected Governments, launched a $426 million regional consolidated appeal to address life-saving needs and the underlying causes of vulnerability to drought in the Horn of Africa. It is hoped that tackling these issues from a longer-term perspective and on a

regional scale will promote a more coherent response, a more flexible and effective use of resources and will reduce overall vulnerability. The successful implementation of the regional appeal, however, requires that the United Nations strengthen its regional coordination structures. The establishment of a temporary regional coordinator for tsunami-affected countries helped to bring coherence to the relief and recovery effort in those areas. Such an arrangement should be considered in the Horn of Africa.

B. Developments in complex emergencies

13. Though the number of deaths from armed conflict has fallen during the past two decades, (wars in the 1990s were only one third as deadly as wars in the 1970s), the tally of combat deaths does not adequately represent the true human costs of conflict. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, most of the 3.9 million people who have perished in the civil war died of preventable disease and hunger. The general strike in Nepal resulted in 16 deaths, but significantly disrupted access to basic services in most parts of the country. Following the subsequent reinstatement of Parliament and an all-party Government, the international community restored aid packages to Nepal. Such examples reinforce the need for a more holistic approach to humanitarian assistance that requires the joint efforts of relief and development actors to addressing life-sustaining — as well as life-saving — activities from the outset.

14. The spread of what began as localized conflicts to neighbouring countries has also challenged the humanitarian community. As aid agencies struggle to feed more than 200,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad, Chadians themselves have been forced to leave their villages following an escalation in fighting between the Chadian army and rebel groups early in 2006. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that at least 13,000 people fled Chad into the Darfur region of the Sudan during the spring of 2006. The Lord's Resistance Army continues to operate beyond northern Uganda into north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and into southern Sudan, as evidenced by clashes between peacekeepers and Lord's Resistance Army groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and by Lord's Resistance Army-forced conscription of children in southern Sudan. Such developments have forced the cessation of some humanitarian activities. Though an agreement was recently reached between the Government of Southern Sudan and Lord's Resistance Army leaders, it is not yet clear whether the resulting diminished levels of violence will hold in the long term.

C. Population movements

15. According to UNHCR, the number of global refugees decreased from 9.5 million to 8.4 million in 2005, resulting from an unusually low number of new arrivals alongside a continuing high number of refugee returns. The global refugee total was the lowest since 1980, largely as a result of the continuing major repatriation operation in Afghanistan (752,000 returnees in 2005), and in Liberia (70,000). During 2005, some 136,000 people became refugees as a result of mass outflows. Togo was the main source of new refugee displacement in 2005, with 39,000 refugees fleeing the country, followed by refugees from the Sudan (34,000)

and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (16,000). Those figures do not include the 4.3 million Palestinian refugees registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

16. At the end of 2005, approximately 23 million people remained internally displaced as a result of armed conflict and generalized violence. Millions more were displaced by natural disasters. More than 50 per cent of those displaced by conflict are concentrated in four countries: the Sudan (an estimated 5 million), Colombia (3.7 million), Uganda (2 million) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.7 million). Since the end of 2004, approximately 2 million internally displaced persons were able to return home, including 1.6 million in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 260,000 in Liberia. However, the protection of internally displaced persons in most countries remains inadequate; internally displaced persons continue to be subject to grave human rights violations perpetrated by State and non-State actors alike, including murder, beatings, rape, denial of access to humanitarian assistance and of property rights. People displaced by natural disasters have also faced protection challenges, including those related to voluntary, safe and dignified return.

17. Governments have the primary responsibility to assist and protect people displaced within their borders, and in a growing number of cases, have adopted national laws and policies in that regard. The fact that Member States recognized the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as an important international framework for the protection of internally displaced persons in the 2005 World Summit Outcome and stressed their resolve to take effective measures to increase the protection of such persons is also a significant step towards finding solutions to the plight of internally displaced persons. Such positive developments have not been matched, however, by more effective protection and assistance on the ground. The implementation of the cluster approach should help address some of these gaps. However, Governments with internally displaced persons or populations at risk of displacement are encouraged to review their legislation, as required, drawing from the Guiding Principles, with a view towards building their own capacity to assist and protect internally displaced persons, and to request international assistance to support them in this task.

III. Implementing improved humanitarian response

18. In 2005, Member States endorsed improvements to the humanitarian system in three broad areas: (i) strengthening the capacity of the United Nations humanitarian system to identify and fill gaps in critical humanitarian programming sectors; (ii) improving United Nations coordination activities at the field level; and (iii) providing rapid access to funds in the initial phases of a humanitarian emergency, in cases of unanticipated humanitarian needs, as well as addressing core needs in underfunded emergencies (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/4). Based on such guidance, the Emergency Relief Coordinator together with his humanitarian partners, embarked on several initiatives aimed at improving the predictability, accountability and effectiveness of humanitarian response.

A. Filling response gaps: the cluster leadership approach

19. The key requirements to improving the humanitarian system are the development of a stronger standing response capacity, more predictable and responsible leadership, greater effectiveness in aid delivery and improved coordination. To address those issues, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, together with his humanitarian partners, developed the "cluster leadership approach", whereby humanitarian "clusters", or groups of humanitarian organizations and other stakeholders, work together to collectively address identified gaps in response and to enhance the effectiveness of response.

20. The cluster leadership approach operates at both the global and country level. At the global level, it seeks to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies by designating global "cluster leads" who are accountable for ensuring predictable and effective inter-agency responses within sectors or areas of activity. This includes enhancing standard-setting, monitoring and advocacy; strengthening surge capacity and standby rosters; securing consistent access to appropriately trained technical staff; establishing or improving material stockpiles and improving response capacity through pooling of effort and resources. Global cluster leads have been established in nine areas of humanitarian activity, including traditional relief and assistance sectors (water and sanitation, nutrition, health and emergency shelter); service provision (emergency telecommunications and logistics) and cross-cutting issues (camp coordination/management, early recovery and protection).

21. At the country level, the aim of the cluster leadership approach is to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance by ensuring identified and predictable leadership in key gap areas/sectors of response; creating stronger partnerships among relevant humanitarian actors in critical gap areas of humanitarian operations; strengthening the cluster responsibility to the humanitarian coordinator; and improving strategic, field-level coordination and prioritization. At a country level, cluster lead agencies collaborate closely with relevant Government partners, where appropriate, and aim to build national response capacity to help fill gap areas. To date, the cluster approach was implemented in the Pakistan earthquake response, and is currently being implemented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia and Uganda.

22. The early experience of implementing this approach suggests that where there is capacity to demonstrate cluster leadership, the approach can potentially contribute to improved decision-making and response by humanitarian actors. During its application in Pakistan, clusters were able to provide Government actors with a more coherent response structure and easily identifiable international counterparts. The improved coordination and decision-making that has been achieved as a result of the cluster approach should be considered as a critical first step, however, rather than as a solution.

23. Moreover, strengthening response capacities at all levels cannot be addressed solely through improved leadership and organization, but requires, in some instances, resolving the lack of global supplies and expertise. Clusters, at the global level, will become increasingly important for addressing capacity concerns, particularly in the development of surge capacity and in the delivery of emergency

shelter, which remains a problematic area. Longer-term investment in preparedness by all actors, including donors, is required to further improve response capacity.

24. Addressing response gaps also requires making resources available to assist cluster leads in mobilizing staff and material resources when they are not readily found. In March 2006, the Secretary-General issued a global cluster appeal, seeking $39.7 million to fund the initial implementation of the nine clusters at the global level. At the field level, costs associated with implementing the cluster approach are being incorporated into revisions of the relevant consolidated appeals, and into flash appeals issued for new emergencies. The timely and active funding of cluster-related activities at both the global and country level will become critical to the effectiveness of the cluster leadership approach as it is applied to both new and ongoing humanitarian crises.

B. Improving coordination: strengthening the humanitarian coordinator system

25. As endorsed by the Economic and Social Council and as reiterated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, strengthening the way the United Nations is represented at the country level is critical to ensuring an efficient, coherent, coordinated and better-performing United Nations. In terms of humanitarian coordination, this means creating a humanitarian coordinator system that engenders and supports effective leadership in humanitarian emergencies. As the Emergency Relief Coordinator's representatives at the field level, humanitarian coordinators should play both a strategic role in the identification of gaps and prioritization of relief activities, and a facilitative role in coordinating the activities of all parties involved in the response.

26. Strengthening humanitarian response coordination at the field level requires identifying, training, mentoring and supporting the most effective individuals in the system as humanitarian coordinators, as well as developing humanitarian skills and capabilities in those resident coordinators serving in countries at risk for humanitarian crises. As a result, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his humanitarian partners have created a pool of pre-certified candidates that can be deployed for short-term and/or immediate assignment as humanitarian coordinators. In addition, he has developed a strengthened training programme to develop improved skills and management capacities for all incumbent humanitarian coordinators and has extended humanitarian coordination workshops to current resident coordinators. There is also a need for both development and humanitarian actors to address the critical question of country-level leadership and handover responsibilities in transition situations.

C. Ensuring predictable financing: the Central Emergency Response Fund

27. Following the upgrade of the former Central Emergency Revolving Fund to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) on 15 December 2005, I launched the new CERF on 9 March 2006 with $254 million in new pledges by 40 Governments, one local government, and one private sector organization, including many first-time contributors to humanitarian assistance (see http://cerf.un.org).

28. Once launched, the Fund was immediately put into practice. By the end of May, the Emergency Relief Coordinator received funding requests from humanitarian coordinators totalling $76 million for rapid response in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger, the Sudan/Darfur, the Sudan/South and the Horn of Africa. The $25 million disbursement of CERF funds to address the drought in the Horn of Africa was used in coordination with the launch of the Flash Appeal so that CERF allocations could be counted against key projects in the appeal. In April, the Emergency Relief Coordinator disbursed $5.5 million of CERF funds to agencies and organizations working in the Niger to avoid the interruption of time-critical food deliveries to meet the nutritional needs of some 300,000 malnourished families. The Emergency Relief Coordinator's decision to allocate $20 million for Darfur and $6 million for Chad came in response to the displacement of more than 200,000 new internally displaced persons in Darfur and the migration of at least 6,000 new refugees to Chad in early 2006.

29. In May, the Emergency Relief Coordinator made the first of two CERF allocations to fund life-saving activities in underfunded crises. Based on data collected through the United Nations Financial Tracking Services, and in consultation with humanitarian partners, the Emergency Relief Coordinator identified the least-funded crises based on funding levels inside and outside consolidated appeals and allocated $32 million among them.[1] A second tranche of $42 million for underfunded crises will follow the midterm review of the 2006 consolidated appeal in July 2006 and is subject to the availability of funds. More detailed information on these allocations may be found on the CERF website.

30. Following the CERF launch, I appointed a 12-member Advisory Group to provide me with guidance on the use and impact of the Fund. On 23 May, the CERF Advisory Group met to discuss the early use and management of CERF. A summary of these discussions and a more detailed analysis of the use of CERF will be made available as an addendum to the present report for consideration by the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

31. The establishment, launch and early implementation of the new CERF represent important steps towards achieving faster, more predictable and needs-based humanitarian assistance. For CERF to remain an effective funding tool, however, the pledges made by donors at the launch must be converted into funding commitments that are sustained beyond the first year.

32. It is also important to recognize the limits of CERF. The Fund is meant to act as a mechanism of last resort when alternate sources of funds cannot be found in the time or quantity required. In the case of chronically underfunded crises, CERF funds are only meant to temporarily mitigate the unevenness and slowness of the voluntary contribution system. The Fund is not intended to replace existing humanitarian appeals mechanisms nor the emergency funds established by individual agencies. Donor funding to CERF must therefore be additional to the timely support from donors to the emergency response funds and appeals of

[1] Burundi ($2 million), the Central African Republic ($1 million), Chad ($4 million), Côte d'Ivoire ($1 million), the Democratic Republic of the Congo ($17 million), the Republic of the Congo ($1 million), and Guinea ($1 million), Haiti ($1 million), Zimbabwe ($1 million), and $3 million for the protracted refugee caseloads in Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia.

individual agencies and humanitarian organizations — particularly those who are not eligible for CERF funding[2] — as well as to consolidated and flash appeals.

33. Implementation of CERF has also highlighted the need for better information and analysis. The application of CERF funds requires an accurate and common understanding of humanitarian needs, gaps, priorities and capacities, an ability to share and compare such information system-wide and leadership on the part of the resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator to use this information and effectively prioritize needs. Accurate and more systematic reporting by donor and recipient agencies and by Governments of all humanitarian aid flows through the financial tracking system would enable the United Nations to better analyse funding gaps and be more accurate and transparent in the way it reports on how aid is used.

D. Next steps: broadening engagement

34. Improvements to the humanitarian response system will only work if all actors are involved. The fact that host and neighbouring Governments, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and community-based organizations often provide the bulk of humanitarian assistance and possess substantial capacities and expertise has been overlooked by United Nations efforts to strengthen humanitarian response to date. It is therefore critical that the next phase focus on broadening engagement with non-United Nations actors and developing more formal structures for interaction. The development of clusters offers an important opportunity to engage and involve all parts of the humanitarian community. The broadening of country teams may be another way of making current reform efforts more inclusive and ensuring that non-United Nations actors engage in a more predictable and systematic way.

IV. Strengthening local, national and regional capacities to prepare for and respond to crises

35. National and local authorities bear the primary responsibility of responding to crises that occur on their territory. Indeed, in disasters associated with natural hazards, local and national actors provide the bulk of the support that is required to help affected communities survive. In complex emergencies, local and national authorities are often unable to address humanitarian needs, particularly in protracted crisis situations. National ownership and leadership are nonetheless critical to both humanitarian assistance and to the consolidation of peace in post-conflict settings.

36. In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, affected communities often launch spontaneous search and rescue efforts, gather and distribute relief assistance and provide shelter and protection to those in need. The contribution of affected communities to relief efforts, however, is difficult to quantify and is therefore not adequately recognized or supported.

[2] The United Nations and its funds, programmes, and specialized agencies as well as the International Organization for Migration are eligible to apply for CERF funding. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations may not apply for CERF funds, but may benefit indirectly through partnership arrangements with eligible organizations.

37. Regional organizations increasingly play an important, complementary role in response and risk reduction. These organizations are well situated to be of help, given their geographic proximity to the affected country, their close understanding of national conditions and disaster management structures, and the existence of regional preparedness capabilities and networks. The level of involvement of regional organizations in responding to disasters has been mixed.

38. The international community has a responsibility to support local, national and regional capacities to prepare for and respond to crises and to strengthen them when they are deficient. While this tenet is well established, supporting and strengthening national and local response capacities, including through the use, development and training of volunteers, has yet to result in concrete progress.

A. Mapping national and local response capacities

39. Mapping existing response capacities at the local, national and regional levels is a prerequisite to assessing which capacities need strengthening, and where. Such an exercise should be conducted well ahead of a crisis, should be a standard component of international preparedness efforts and should include an assessment of institutional mechanisms, available technology and technical expertise, standby arrangements, stockpiles and training programmes. Focusing on national- and local-level capacity mapping in countries at risk of humanitarian crises is more feasible than attempting to do so on a global scale. Local governments and communities must be involved in identifying their capacity development needs.

40. Several initiatives are under way to map local response capacities in Central Asia, in the Caucuses and as part of the Hyogo Framework for Action. Relevant humanitarian, development and risk reduction organizations of the United Nations system should continue to improve the coordination and implementation of efforts to map and strengthen local, national and regional response capacities, beginning in countries at risk for humanitarian crises.

B. Strengthening local and national response capacities

41. Strengthening local, national and regional response capacities is a critical ingredient of effective risk management. It entails viewing response preparedness efforts as part of longer-term attempts to strengthen the resilience of societies and adopting a comprehensive view of risk that encompasses both human-induced and natural hazards as part of affected countries' natural development path. It entails placing local actors at the centre of relief efforts and of disaster management processes, with international actors serving as enablers and facilitators.

42. Strengthening government capacity requires a commitment by local and national governments, with the support of the international community, to develop dedicated civilian disaster management institutions at all levels and to establish national contingency plans, developed in consultation with community leaders and local NGOs. This also includes strengthening disaster preparedness plans at national and subnational levels, including the development of response and recovery plans; common assistance levels and targets; standard operating procedures, the collection and dissemination of baseline data related to vulnerable populations and a legal

preparedness framework that sets out how international aid will be regulated during emergency and recovery phases.

43. Strengthening the capacity of local NGOs and community-based organizations is a way of enhancing the speed and the cultural appropriateness of the response. The community-based approach pursued by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies serves as a model of how such support might be accomplished. Long-term support by international NGOs to local partners in countries such as Bangladesh, Cuba, Mozambique and the Philippines has also been a successful way of building local capacity to effectively respond to disasters occurring in those countries. Such approaches should be replicated in other disaster-prone countries and encouraged by the United Nations and by Governments.

C. Coordination

44. Overcoming the challenges of coordination among and between national and local actors should also be an important focus of capacity-building efforts. This includes encouraging and supporting Governments in establishing and leading coordination structures for engagement with the United Nations system, national Red Cross or Red Crescent societies and NGOs. This also means supporting the establishment of NGO consortia ahead of and during a crisis and recognizing such consortia as partners in the response. Such recognition could, for example, mean the participation of such consortia as part of an expanded country team.

45. Finally, for capacity development efforts to succeed, Governments must also create an enabling environment for local organizations to engage in relief and risk management activities. Political leadership, the prevailing political, legal and governance systems are critical to facilitating opportunities for capacity development. Advocacy efforts are required to convince Governments and local communities that such capacities need strengthening.

D. Funding

46. Though the importance of response capacity-building efforts is regularly reaffirmed in intergovernmental resolutions and in the Hyogo Framework for Action, such activities continue to be constrained by a lack of funding. This would appear to reflect the low priority attributed to the issue by donors and the fact that it falls in between relief and development budget lines. A particular constraint to local capacity-building is a lack of direct access to funding to local organizations. Initiatives such as the development of umbrella grants administered by international NGOs to national NGOs in the Balkans is a best practice that could be adapted to other areas, especially where consortia of NGOs on the ground are weak. The United Nations might also play a support role in advocating for funds from donors and in using some of its own resources for response capacity-building support.

V. The application of humanitarian principles, and other issues of concern

A. Restrictions on humanitarian access

47. Both State and non-State actors in situations of armed conflict have an obligation to ensure that the affected populations have access to the assistance they require for their survival. If they are unable or unwilling to fulfil that obligation, the international community has a responsibility to ensure that humanitarian aid is provided in a principled way. States also have the primary responsibility in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within their territory and in the facilitation of the work of humanitarian organizations in mitigating the consequences of natural disasters. Restrictions on the access of humanitarian personnel to needy populations, however, continue to impede response efforts in a number of areas.

48. Some countries have found it difficult to accept the existence of a "humanitarian crisis" within their borders, resulting in restricted access by humanitarian workers. The humanitarian crises in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea and the Niger call for the need for better understanding between "humanitarians" and the authorities concerned. Although such restrictions often result from a variety of political and security reasons, agreeing on a common understanding of what constitutes a situation that requires international emergency assistance may contribute to reducing such restrictions in the future.

49. In operations where the United Nations is engaged in relief activities, restrictions on access by humanitarian personnel continue to deprive millions of civilians in need of assistance. Afghanistan continues to present one of the most difficult working environments for humanitarian operations, as large portions of the country are accessible only intermittently. In the southern Sudanese province of Equatoria, key access roads have now become inaccessible to humanitarian workers without military escorts and relief operations have had to be suspended in many areas. The Government of the Sudan also continues to impede humanitarian operations overall, which includes providing assistance to 3.5 million people in Darfur. In Western Darfur alone, the United Nations has only sporadic access to close to 650,000 people in need. With close to 400,000 internally displaced persons, Somalia hosts the world's biggest internally displaced population. Yet few benefit from humanitarian assistance because of limited humanitarian access.

50. Orchestrated threats, intimidation and attacks against humanitarian actors in Côte d'Ivoire have resulted in delays and suspension of assistance. Continuous harassment of humanitarian workers has impeded relief and protection initiatives in Darfur, eastern Chad and the Central African Republic. Similar conditions prevail in northern Uganda as a result of the actions of the Lord's Resistance Army. Conversely, as a result of the robust operations of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, previously inaccessible areas are now open to humanitarian intervention.

51. Such situations reflect the need for Governments hosting humanitarian operations to recognize the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and of humanitarian coordinators in negotiating access to such areas on behalf of the United Nations system in conformity with humanitarian principles.

B. Gender-based violence

52. Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. Sexual violence, a form of gender-based violence that includes any act, attempt, or threat of a sexual nature, is the most common type of gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies and is often life-threatening. Non-sexual forms of gender-based violence, such as female genital mutilation, forced early marriage, honour killings and domestic violence are also prevalent. Women and girls of all ages make up the majority of the victims; however, men and boys are also both direct and indirect victims.

53. Ending gender-based violence is the primary responsibility of States, as enshrined in national and international legal instruments. Gender-based violence in humanitarian crises remains a significant and growing concern, however. Gender-based violence has reached epidemic proportions in conflict settings, where it is commonly used as a tactic of war to destabilize populations and humiliate victims and their families. Gender-based violence is also prevalent in the aftermath of disasters, where mass displacement disrupts government and community structures, and where a breakdown in the rule of law often ensues. In situations of armed conflict, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Protocols additional thereto provide specific protections for women and girls.[3] With respect to other humanitarian emergency situations, gender-based violence is covered by human rights law[4] and may fall within the framework of several statutes, conventions and declarations.[5] Many, but not all, forms of gender-based violence are codified as illegal and criminal acts in national laws and policies. The combined application of national and international laws is needed to guarantee the physical security and mental integrity of men and women against such violence.

54. Ending gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies requires efforts that prevent and deter its use in settings of war and displacement, mitigate the collateral effects within communities and provide appropriate support to survivors. Prevention activities include ensuring that physical protection measures are in place and enforced. Such measures may include police training, community implementation of safe food distribution, camp management and fuel collection strategies and public awareness campaigns. Support to survivors includes assistance and protection initiatives such as the establishment of women's community support centres in Western Darfur; the training of national health staff in clinical management of rape survivors in Kenya, Uganda and West Africa; and the implementation of a multisectoral programme supporting some 10,000 rape

[3] Article 27 of the fourth Geneva Convention, in particular, states that women should be protected against "any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution or any form of sexual assault".

[4] Certain rights are non-derogable and must be respected at all times. Refer to article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

[5] Certain forms of gender-based violence are also considered forms of torture, and in certain circumstances may amount to crimes against humanity, war crimes or forms of genocide and therefore fall within the framework of several statutes, conventions and declarations, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the statutes of the international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Such initiatives require the participation of Governments, when possible, the United Nations, international and national NGOs and donors. Using the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings and ensuring that gender-based violence programmes are included — and funded — in consolidated and flash appeals are important ways forward.

55. Despite repeated condemnations of such violence in numerous international forums, gender-based violence persists unchallenged in many areas. Some Governments fail to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem, provide effective physical protection or allow access to treatment. Victims are publicly shamed or imprisoned, survivors and staff providing assistance are harassed and intimidated and perpetrators go unpunished. The lack of a functioning police or judicial system in some humanitarian emergency settings, combined with fears of social reprisals, allow such crimes to take place without consequence. Fighting such impunity should begin with State efforts to review, strengthen and enforce effective legal, judicial and community mechanisms that recognize, report and punish such acts as crimes and that ensure the compensation, protection and support to survivors.

56. Fighting impunity also includes ending the sexual exploitation and abuse of civilians by some United Nations personnel. A recent study on the exploitation of children in Liberia sadly reported abuses by United Nations peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. The United Nations has taken a number of steps to address the problem. These include developing and disseminating standards of conduct, conducting training, introducing clearer reporting mechanisms and developing a policy for assistance to victims. Contracts have been changed for different categories of personnel to incorporate required standards of behaviour. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has been working closely with Office of Internal Oversight Services to improve investigative capacity, the recording and tracking of cases and follow-up with Member States for allegations involving troops or police. Work has also started on improving mechanisms for managerial accountability. While different policies and measures have been introduced, implementation is still slow.

C. Chronically underfunded crises

57. Responding to crises in accordance with humanitarian principles requires flexible, predictable and timely funding based on demonstrable need. While the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative[6] aims to promote such principles in donor behaviour, it has not had a substantial impact on the flow of funds to underfunded crises or sectors.

58. A superficial overview of humanitarian financing over the past five years paints a reassuring picture: humanitarian assistance levels have remained steady at about $5.7 billion between 1999 and 2002 and then increased in the period 2003-2005 by more than $2 billion in two consecutive years of growth. A deeper look, however, suggests that such increases may be attributable to spikes in assistance to large-scale crises in Afghanistan, Iraq and tsunami-affected countries, and that

[6] The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative provides a forum for donors to discuss good practice in funding humanitarian assistance, to guide official humanitarian aid and to encouraging greater accountability.

humanitarian performance continues to be affected by unpredictability and variability of aid flows between countries and crises, between sectors and over time.

59. For example, where there are proximate levels of need, responses are not necessarily proportionate. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as estimated 1,200 people continue to die every day from the consequences of the conflict. The maternal mortality rate, estimated to be 1,837 deaths per 100,000, could be one of the highest in the world and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates continue to climb. Despite such alarming figures, needy people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received about $100 of relief assistance per person in 2005, while the victims of the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami received more than 10 times that amount.

60. Humanitarian funding does not always go where it is most needed. A study conducted by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, for example, found that there is little to no correlation between the severity of a disaster (as determined by number of deaths and economic losses) and the levels of assistance received. Such behaviour dictates that, although Caribbean countries were the most affected in terms of disaster-related losses to gross domestic product from 2000 to 2005, the region received only 9 per cent of the total international humanitarian assistance during the same period.

61. Humanitarian aid flows have also been inconsistent and unpredictable over time. While the humanitarian crisis in the Sudan received 75 per cent of its funding requirements in 2004, it received only half in 2005, and less than 20 per cent in 2006 at midyear. Such downward trends are threatening the viability of humanitarian activities in Darfur as humanitarian organizations have commitments that they are unable to underwrite. The chronic underfunding of certain sectors has also led to the erosion of capacity and a decline in the quality of assistance.

62. Such funding patterns suggests that humanitarian aid flows are imbalanced for a variety of reasons: lack of media profile, strategic/economic interests, weak political will, differences in social values or a perception by donors that their contributions will be inefficiently or inappropriately used by Governments or aid programmes. Whether wilfully ignored or inadequately addressed, the impact of underfunding of crises could be minimized through a more empirical approach to humanitarian assistance and the development and use of universally accepted parameters to define it. Such parameters should include common agreement on what constitutes an "underfunded crisis" derived from the development of minimum levels of assistance and of indicators for assessing performance and impact. Such indicators should be based on humanitarian principles, derived from internationally agreed rights to assistance, and draw on the considerable work already undertaken in this field, notably by the Sphere Project. Determining minimum levels of assistance and defining "underfunded" would help establish the concept of equity of assistance and would help standardize funding decisions. Such standards would also improve the accountability of the international community to intended beneficiaries.

63. In the longer term, it may also be useful to establish targets that set objectives against which progress in addressing humanitarian needs can be measured. Such targets should be linked to official development assistance and fit into the broader development context by being linked to the Millennium Development Goals. Establishing such targets would contribute to enhancing the credibility and accountability of humanitarian action, ensure greater equity in the distribution of resources across countries, and facilitate the shift from a supply-driven system to a demand-driven one.

64. Such initiatives require the compilation of more robust and better disaggregated data on beneficiaries, better tracking of all humanitarian aid flows by region, country and sector and the routine and systematic consolidation of such information into the analysis of funding flows. The effectiveness of such tracking requires a renewed commitment by donors, participating agencies and organizations and Governments to report the sources and uses of funds both inside and outside United Nations appeals.

65. Bringing more coherence to humanitarian financing also requires the development of improved, flexible multi-year funding mechanisms that allow for greater continuity during periods of sustained crisis, as well as greater coordination between international financial institutions, the United Nations system and even bilateral Government donors on needs assessments and strategic planning. More coherent humanitarian financing would also take a long-term approach to natural disasters, by committing more to disaster risk reduction, so as to concurrently save lives and capital that may otherwise be spent on less cost-efficient disaster response.

D. Civil-military coordination in disaster response

66. In both the response to the Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami in 2004, and the South Asian earthquake in 2005, national, regional and international military support was central to the overall relief efforts. Both experiences demonstrated the need for improved standby arrangements, however, to ensure that military assets are available and utilized when needed and for a greater understanding of the operational and normative frameworks under which civil-military coordination takes place.

67. For example, in Pakistan, several helicopters were needed to assist survivors in mountainous and hard-to-reach areas. Yet when the United Nations called on its Government partners to supply them, helicopters that were appropriate to the task and available for rapid deployment were in limited supply. Responding to large-scale disasters will continue to entail the use of assets, such as helicopters, that require pre-established standby arrangements with major providers of military assets and personnel. Consultations are being finalized with European-based organizations to identify existing capacity and ensure the use of common procedures and agreed guidelines. Such arrangements should be developed and replicated with other major military providers.

E. Integrated missions

68. Intergovernmental resolutions have asked me to ensure that United Nations humanitarian organizations work, as appropriate, with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in order to better ensure that humanitarian issues are accounted for from the earliest stages of planning and design of United Nations multidimensional integrated peacekeeping operations with humanitarian components and that the mandate of such operations continues to respect the need for their humanitarian activities to be carried out in accordance with humanitarian principles.

69. Improvements to the integrated mission planning process have been made, though the inclusion of humanitarian actors in the planning process needs to be improved in some instances. There has been progress in better defining the relationships between humanitarian actors and the political and military elements of

"integrated" peacekeeping missions. In February 2006, I issued the Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions, which specified the working relationships of humanitarian, development, military and political actors and makes specific reference to General Assembly resolution 46/182 and its guiding principles.

70. At an operational level, changes in the planning process are focused on improved strategies, planning and mission design. Such changes have already been included as part of mission planning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, where considerable progress has been made in terms of cooperation among the relevant departments of the Secretariat and United Nations funds, programmes and agencies. Nevertheless, there are challenges ahead. In Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, difficult humanitarian issues in a volatile security environment demand careful identification of priorities and better inclusion of humanitarians in the planning process.

VI. Recommendations

The year in review

71. Recognizing the important links between humanitarian response, early recovery and risk reduction, it is recommended that Member States, donors and relevant humanitarian organizations invest in preparedness, early recovery and risk reduction activities as part of humanitarian response. Such investment should target countries and regions designated as high-risk areas for natural hazards.

72. Recognizing the importance of regional approaches to crises that require a transnational response, I suggest that Member States and relevant humanitarian organizations of the United Nations support regional appeals and coordination mechanisms to promote coherence of response and recovery activities and the most flexible and effective use of resources.

73. I recommend that Governments with internally displaced persons or populations at risk of displacement amend and review their legislation, as required, drawing from the Guiding Principles, with a view towards building their own capacity to assist and protect internally displaced persons, and should request international assistance to support them in this task.

Implementing improved humanitarian response

74. It is also recommended that Member States, donors, relevant United Nations humanitarian agencies and NGOs provide timely and accurate information on contributions and uses of humanitarian funds through the United Nations Financial Tracking Services.

75. I advise that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as manager of the Fund, and United Nations agencies and international organizations eligible for CERF funds reaffirm their collective obligation to maximize the impact and improve the functioning of CERF as envisioned in General Assembly resolution 60/124.

76. Recognizing the efforts to strengthen the capacity of the international humanitarian response system, I recommend that donors provide the necessary voluntary resources for implementing the cluster approach and for cluster-related

activities at the country level as specified in the Cluster Appeal 2006 and in consolidated and flash appeals.

77. Recognizing the importance of broad engagement and coordination of all humanitarian actors to the effectiveness of humanitarian response, I encourage the effective engagement and participation of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, relevant humanitarian NGOs and NGO consortiums in the implementation of improvements to humanitarian assistance.

Strengthening local, national and regional capacities to prepare for and respond to crises

78. It is also important that relevant humanitarian, development and risk reduction organizations of the United Nations system continue to improve the coordination and implementation of efforts to map and strengthen local, national and regional response capacities, beginning in countries at risk for humanitarian crises and in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action.

79. I encourage Governments in disaster-prone countries to strengthen their capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters, with the support of the international community, including by developing dedicated civilian disaster management institutions at all levels and by establishing national contingency plans, in consultation with community leaders and local NGOs.

80. It is also essential that Governments in disaster-prone countries establish coordination structures for engagement with the United Nations system, national Red Cross or Red Crescent societies and NGOs.

81. Recognizing the important role of non-governmental and community-based organizations as the first line of defence in disaster response, I encourage the international humanitarian community to invest in long-term partnerships with local NGOs and community-based organizations in disaster-prone countries and communities.

82. I recommend that Member States and donors recognize the importance of coordination of all humanitarian actors and support the establishment of NGO consortiums ahead of and during a crisis.

83. Recognizing the important role of non-governmental and community-based organizations as first responders in natural disasters, I encourage Governments in disaster-prone countries to create an enabling environment for capacity-building of such organizations and for facilitating their operations.

The application of humanitarian principles, and other issues of concern

Humanitarian access

84. Recognizing the need for a common understanding of what constitutes a situation that requires emergency international assistance, I recommend that relevant organizations of the United Nations system explore the development of parameters for international emergency response.

85. I also encourage Member States and relevant humanitarian organizations to recognize the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and humanitarian

coordinators in requesting access for the relevant humanitarian organizations of the United Nations system to populations in need of humanitarian assistance.

Gender-based violence

86. Member States should recognize that gender-based violence, meaning any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females, is a significant and growing concern in humanitarian crises.

87. Member States, regional groups and relevant humanitarian organizations of the United Nations system should prevent the incidence of gender-based violence in conflict and displacement settings, including through physical protection measures, training and public education.

88. Member States and the relevant humanitarian organizations of the United Nations system should strengthen support to survivors of gender-based violence, including by strengthening national legislation and victims' support policies, and by providing physical and psychosocial support.

89. Member States should have their ability strengthened to report, investigate and prosecute acts of gender-based violence, through the development and application of national laws and policies and by enforcing provisions in international legal instruments.

Chronically underfunded crises

90. United Nations humanitarian organizations should develop common mechanisms for reporting data and information on beneficiaries.

91. Recognizing the inequities in humanitarian aid flows, I recommend that donors and relevant organizations of the United Nations system develop indicators for humanitarian assistance, including by establishing minimum levels of assistance to beneficiaries, and by setting long-term targets linked to the Millennium Development Goals, including through the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.

92. Recognizing the need for greater continuity of assistance during periods of sustained crisis, I also recommend that donors and relevant humanitarian organizations of the United Nations system develop flexible, multi-year funding mechanisms, including through the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.

Civil-Military coordination

93. Relevant organizations of the United Nations system should further improve standby arrangements with major providers of military assets and personnel.